OUSE VOTES TO KEEP ASSASSINATION PANEL

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fter Sprague Quits as Staff Chief, Inquiry Is Extended Through '78

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WASHINGTON, March 30—The House of Representatives voted today to keep its Select Committee on Assassinations in existence through next year. The vote was taken after the committee's chief counsel, Richard A. Sprague, resigned.

The vote, which was 230 to 181, assures that the embattled committee, which was established last September, will be able to pursue its investigations of the assassinations of President Kennedy and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. throughout the term of the current 95th Congress.

The 12-member committee, which received an interim extension by the House last Feb. 2, would have gone out of business tomorrow if the House had not preserved it.

In Florida, sources familiar with the apparent suicide of George de Mohrenschildt, whose testimony the committee had been seeking, said today that he might once have been a Central Intelligence Agency operative and a confidant of Lee Harvey Oswald. [Page 14]

Members of the committee and other representatives acknowledged that the

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resignation of Mr. Sprague, which was announced this morning before the House convened, had made it easier to secure enough votes to reconstitute the committee.

Resignation 'Meant 40 Votes'

"With Sprague resigning, they claim it means 40 more votes," the Speaker of the House, Thomas P. O'Neill Jr., Democrat of Massachusetts, said before the vote.

The former chairman of the committee, Representative Henry B. Gonzalez, Democrat of Texas, tried to dismiss Mr. Sprague as chief counsel and staff director last month on the ground of alleged insubordination. But the 11 other members of the committee backed Mr. Sprague, and Mr. Gonzalez resigned his post earlier this month.

In the last two days, Mr. Gonzalez had made speeches on the House floor accusing Mr. Sprague of, among other things, interfering with his work as chairman, insubordination and creating disharmony.

Last night several members of the committee gathered in the office of Representative Louis Stokes, Democrat of Ohio, who is the new committee chairman, and concluded, according to one participant, that they were about 25 votes short of the majority needed to reconstitute the committee.

'Facts of Life' Discussed

A number of representatives had told committee members that the continued presence of Mr. Sprague on the committee would lead them to vote against continuing the committee.

The committee members discussed what Representative Robert W. Edgar, Democrat of Pennsylvania, called "the facts of life" with Mr. Sprague, who then went to an anteroom and dictated a letter to the committee. The letter said:

"I am hereby submitting my resignation effective immediately, as chief counsel and staff director of the House Select Committee on Assassinations.

"I do so with the hope that the Congress can now proceed with the challenge of seeing that these investigations are pursued promptly."

Mr. Sprague, 51 years old, who had gained a reputation as an aggressive prosecutor in Pennsylvania before joining the committee late last year, left town after resigning, according to a committee spokesman.

Today's events marked another turning point in the brief, turbulent history of the committee, which was created last year with only 65 dissenting votes.

Before the public dispute arose between Mr. Gonzalez and Mr. Sprague, the chief counsel had angered some representatives by requesting a budget of $13 million to conduct the investigations over a two-year period. The committee later trimmed that budget request to $2.8 million for the first year, with the expectation that a similar amount would be sought next year.

Members of the committee said that Mr. Sprague had resigned voluntarily and that the committee met this morning to accept his resignation "with regret."

The committee members unanimously praised Mr. Sprague for his work and made public transcripts of a closed meeting they held earlier this month with Mr. Sprague. The representatives said that the transcripts refuted all the criticism that had been made against Mr. Sprague by Mr. Gonzalez and in news accounts.

Pickle Calls Inquiry 'Sick Cat'

Walter E. Fauntroy, Democrat, delegate from the District of Columbia, said that allegations against Mr. Sprague had "absolutely no basis in fact" and added that the counsel's resignation to allow the investigations to continue "in my judgment merits the Congressional Medal of Honor."

Representative Samuel L. Devine, Republican of Ohio, said that other members of the House had told committee members: "If you get rid of that Sprague, we'll go with you. That's what it's all about."

In the four hours of debate later on the House floor, several representatives criticized the committee's work. Representative J. J. Pickle, Democrat of Texas, called the investigations "a sick cat."

But supporters of the committee contended that the investigators should be allowed to try to resolve unanswered questions about the Kennedy and King assassinations. Committee members also contended that they were pursuing "new leads," but did not give details.

The House, however, rejected, 226 to 185, an effort to get it to go into a rare secret session to hear evidence the committee has gathered. Also, the House voted, 223 to 195, to delete the committee's request for authority to intervene in lawsuits or to seek court actions to seek information.